

NCA  
VOC FOR IOP/FN  
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5738  
MARY ANDERSON/NEW DELHI

APRIL 19, 1978

## INTERNATIONAL GYPSY CONGRESS

ANNCR:

THE PRESENTATION OF A PARCEL OF INDIAN SOIL OPENED THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL ROMANY CONGRESS IN GENEVA EARLIER THIS MONTH, SYMBOLIZING TO THE GYPSY PEOPLE THE WORLD OVER THAT INDIA IS THE ORIGINAL HOME OF THEIR ANCESTORS. MARY ANDERSON HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT FROM NEW DELHI.

VOICE:

THE SECOND MEETING OF THE WORLD ROMANY CONGRESS, REPRESENTING TEN MILLION GYPSIES AROUND THE GLOBE, OPENED IN GENEVA ON APRIL EIGHTH WITH THE PRESENTATION OF A PACKET OF SOIL FROM INDIA'S PUNJAB STATE. A MESSAGE FROM THE PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER WAS READ TELLING THE GYPSY GATHERING THAT RESEARCH HAD PROVED BEYOND DOUBT THAT THE SIX MILLION ROMANY, OR GYPSY PEOPLE OF EUROPE AND AMERICA ARE DESCENDED FROM THAT JAT AND RAJPUT CLANS OF NORTHWESTERN INDIA. GYPSIES THE WORLD OVER ARE PROUD OF THEIR INDIAN ORIGIN. THEY THE THEIR ANCIENT MOTHERLAND "BARO THAN", THE GREAT COUNTRY, AND SENT A LARGE CONTINGENT TO THE 1976 INTERNATIONAL ROMANY FESTIVAL HELD IN INDIA.

MOST SCHOLARS AGREE WITH THE GYPSY LEGEND WHICH SAYS THAT WAVES OF INDIAN GYPSIES LEFT THEIR HOMELAND FLEEING FROM INVADING BARBARIANS AT SOME UNCERTAIN PERIOD CENTURIES AGO. EUROPEAN CHRONICLES FIRST MENTION THE PRESENCE OF ASIAN GYPSIES AROUND 1100 A.D., AFTER THEIR LONG SOJOURN IN PERSIA AND ARMENIA. EVEN TODAY THE GREATEST CONCENTRATIONS OF GYPSIES ARE IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES JUST BEYOND THE LAND-BRIDGE WHERE THEY FIRST CROSSED FROM ASIA.

THE CHIEF AIM OF THEIR YEAR'S ROMANY CONGRESS IN GENEVA WAS TO OBTAIN EQUAL HUMAN RIGHTS FOR GYPSIES EVERYWHERE AND TO SECURE RECOGNITION UNDER THE UNITED NATIONS AS AN AFFILIATED, NON - GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION REPRESENTING THE WORLD'S GYPSY POPULATION. ABOUT HALF THE EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN GYPSIES HAVE GIVEN UP CARAVAN LIFE AND ARE SETTLED IN CAPS NEAR LARGE CITIES. TO MAINTAIN THEIR GYPSY IDENTITY, THE ROMANY CONGRESS SEEKS SCHOOLING FOR THE CHILDREN TAUGHT IN THEIR OWN ROMANY LANGUAGE, WHICH STILL CONTAINS MANY WORDS FROM INDIAN DIALECTS. THEY ALSO WANT MORE ENCAMPMENT SITES FOR THEIR CARAVANS, WHICH THESE DAYS ARE MOTORIZED.

THE GENEVA GYPSY CONFERENCE COMES AT A TIME WHEN INDIA IS STRUGGLING TO INTEGRATE THE GYPSY MILLIONS WHO REMAINED IN THEIR HOMELAND. LIKE THEIR DISTANT COUSINS ABROAD, THE WANDERING INDIAN TRIBES RESIST SETTLING DOWN IN PERMANENT HOUSING PROVIDED BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT, DESPITE ADVANTAGES OFFERED IN EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION. THE BANJARAS AND OTHER GYPSY TRIBES OF INDIA ARE CONSIDERED OF ALIEN BLOOD, THOUGHT TO HAVE ARRIVED IN INDIA IN ANCIENT TIMES FROM THE PLATEAUS OF CENTRAL ASIA AND MADE THEIR FIRST HOME IN RAJSTHAN AND THE PUNJAB. FOR CENTURIES THEY MOVED ALONG DUSTY TRAILS, CRISSCROSSING INDIA WITH THEIR CATTLE CARAVANS CARRYING GRAIN, SALT, AND SUPPLIES FOR ARMIES IN TIMES OF WAR. NOW, HARD TIMES ARE FORCING MANY TO SET UP SEMI-PERMANENT ENCAMPMENTS NEAR LARGE CONSTRUCTIONS AND ROAD BUILDING SITES TO WORK AS LABORERS.

AS IN EUROPE, THE INDIAN GYPSIES SPEAK A DISTINCTIVE LANGUAGE, OBSERVE SECRET RELIGIOUS RITES, AND SUPPLEMENT THEIR INCOME TELLING FORTUNES, TATTOOING, AND EXHIBITING THEIR LIVELY MUSIC AND DANCES. BUT MANY INDIAN TRAVELLERS ABROAD HAVE SEEN THEIR OWN LIKENESS IN THE DARK, LUSTROUS EYES OF THE ROMANY

PEOPLE OF EUROPE, AND CAN EASILY IDENTIFY WITH THE NOSTALGIC  
GYPSY SONGS WHICH GLORIFY AN ANCIENT INDIAN HOMELAND.

JS/PY